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Intelligence Report

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Cambodia: Military Stalemate Likely in 1995

The limited objectives of the government and Khmer Rouge make continued stalemate likely in 1995 and also reflect their inability to overcome fundamental weaknesses.

The government's military reform program announced last June has made little headway so far, and Cambodian officials say they are hesitant to address the army's problems more forcefully because they do not want an alienated army or officer corps to become a political threat to the government.

Both sides are pursuing limited military strategies as the 1994-95 dry season unfolds:

- [redacted] the army, determined to avoid last year's major dry season defeats, is conducting limited attacks on isolated guerrilla positions in the Cambodian interior, while offering amnesty to guerrillas who defect. The army so far has made some limited gains and has also demonstrated the ability to defend vital areas, such as the nation's second-largest city, Batdambang.
- The Khmer Rouge has launched numerous small attacks on government outposts and supply lines, staging most of them out of their strongholds in the border provinces of Batdambang, Banteay Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Siemreab - Otdar Meanchey.

The military situation could become more volatile and provide either the Khmer Rouge or the government opportunities to make more significant military gains if:

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- A coup or political split in Phnom Penh distracts and weakens the army, allowing the guerrillas to make military and political gains in important parts of the country. [redacted] rivalries within the government coalition are still intense.

- Thailand closes the border to the Khmer Rouge [redacted]

[redacted] would reduce their mobility, worsen their supply situation, and could make their border strongholds at Pailin and Phnom Melai vulnerable to Cambodian attack. [redacted]

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Government Conducting Limited Attacks as 1994 Ended. . .

The government appears determined not to repeat last year's disastrous dry season defeats to the Khmer Rouge.

[redacted] the Khmer Royal Armed Forces (KRAF):

- Captured the mountain stronghold of Phnom Vor in Kampot Province on 27 October, an area that had not been in government hands since independence from France in 1953, [redacted] Phnom Vor, the base from which Khmer Rouge forces had kidnapped and killed at least three Westerners in the last six months, was surrounded by nearly 4,000 government troops but was not captured until Khmer Rouge defectors helped government troops bypass minefields defending the guerrillas' position. [redacted]
- Overran a guerrilla base at Phnom Kulen in Siemreab - Otdar Meanchey Province--a mountainous area northeast of the provincial capital--in early December. [redacted] the commander of the Khmer Rouge division controlling the base defected, allowing the army to capture the position. [redacted]

The army is also seeking to blunt Khmer Rouge thrusts before they develop into threatening attacks. Phnom Penh in the last six months has demonstrated an ability to recover from initial setbacks and defend vital areas. For example, the army:

- Reinforced forces in Preah Vihear Province in September, stemming a Khmer Rouge advance and retaking two districts--Chheb and Chey Sen--that were initially overrun. After the guerrillas again showed signs of increasing activity in the province in October, government units launched attacks along the border and may have entered Thai territory to strike Khmer Rouge strongholds in early November, [redacted]

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- Blocked guerrilla efforts in early December to set up another mountain base at Phnom Chi along the border of Kampong Thum and Kracheh Provinces, according to local press. [redacted]

...While the Khmer Rouge Fights on in the Northwest

The guerrillas are taking advantage of the government's more cautious strategy by mounting new attacks in the country's northwest border provinces. From its three strongholds at Anlong Veng, Pailin, and Phnom Malai, the Khmer Rouge since late summer has conducted small guerrilla attacks on government outposts and supply lines [redacted] The guerrillas:

- Increased their activities in early September in Preah Vihear Province--the capital of their provisional government--moving south from the border with Thailand into the eastern districts. [redacted] Although the situation in the province has stabilized since mid-September, [redacted] remains concerned that Preah Vihear and its isolated capital--with a population of only 5,000--will remain a tempting target.
- Subsequently launched several attacks in eastern Batdambang Province in late September and have continued offensive operations there through December. The guerrillas have concentrated their efforts on Banan District, west of the provincial capital, sometimes operating in units of more than 100 troops. The guerrillas are also building a road and transporting more supplies and ammunition in the district. [redacted] this activity has forced civilians to flee their homes and move into the provincial capital, demonstrating the guerrillas' ability to create insecurity near Cambodia's second-largest city.
- Harassed government units trying to protect Route 69, a key supply line in Banteay Meanchey Province. In late December, the Khmer Rouge drove off government forces and captured territory around the road in Thmar Pok District. [redacted]

The guerrillas' concentration of effort in the northwest and the nature of their operations so far confirms, in our view, [redacted] a modest Khmer Rouge strategy for the 1994-95 dry season. [redacted] the guerrillas are trying to expand their hold on territory in Preah Vihear Province--the capital of their self-declared provisional government--and trying to protect their base at Anlong Veng from another government attack. Guerrilla attacks on villages to abduct peasants and burn their homes have become more frequent, [redacted] and suggest to us an effort by a weakened Khmer Rouge to reduce

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the confidence of the populace in the government and demonstrate the danger of opposing the insurgents. [redacted]

Looking Ahead: Continued Stalemate Likely in 1995

The recent pattern of government and Khmer Rouge activity strengthens our judgment--held since the withdrawal of UNTAC in December 1993--that neither side is organized or strong enough to gain a decisive advantage. On the government side, we continue to see signs that the army's performance is being undermined by a number of serious problems:

[redacted] Officers at all levels are not being held accountable

- *Corruption and poor discipline.* Local commanders have made arrangements with their Khmer Rouge counterparts in the past to avoid bloodshed and maximize profits, and the joint attack on a train in Kampot Province last July that resulted in the capture of three Westerners by the guerrillas suggests the practice continues. [redacted] Government units also engage in banditry, shaking down Khmer and foreigner alike. [redacted]

Soldiers have also set up illegal checkpoints to rob travelers on the few traversable roads in Cambodia. The Cambodian Government says it has increased efforts to suppress banditry on the roads, but a Thai worker repairing Route 4 was reportedly killed in November by a government soldier from a unit that was not supposed to be patrolling the road. [redacted]

- **Inadequate training.** Training facilities in Cambodia remain dilapidated, [redacted] both officers and men are still not well schooled in individual skills and unit tactics. [redacted]

- **An inefficient supply system.** [redacted]

[redacted] Cambodia's roads, bridges, and railroads are in poor condition and vulnerable to Khmer Rouge interdiction. [redacted]

[redacted] the Khmer Rouge, while capable of choosing the location and initial intensity of fighting, also faces serious limitations that prevent the group from taking advantage of the government's weakness:

- **Declining strength.** Defections and desertions that began after the Khmer Rouge boycotted the UN-supervised election in May 1993 appear to be continuing. [redacted] defections since October have contributed to the loss of several guerrilla strongholds--and [redacted] people are not joining the group voluntarily. The Khmer Rouge's continued promotion of armed struggle has eroded its popular support; [redacted] most Cambodians are exhausted from war and want peace and reconstruction. Moreover, the Khmer Rouge became even more politically isolated after being outlawed by the government last July; the law passed by the National Assembly also threatens stiff prison sentences to guerrillas who fail to turn themselves in.

- **Reduced revenues.** The group has yet to recover financially from the major interruption in revenues it suffered when government forces overran its gem mining and logging operations around Pailin last March. [redacted]

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- [REDACTED]
- *Increasing material constraints.* No new major sources of arms and ammunition were detected in 1994. The Khmer Rouge appears limited to what it can buy or capture from government troops, or what it can purchase on the black market.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

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Military Reform Unlikely To Alter Balance

The government's military reform program--announced last June--is intended to improve the army's performance and to secure foreign military assistance from countries that have predicated aid on signs of change. [redacted] the reform plan aims to cut the size of the army and reduce its high ratio of officers to men, a detailed implementation scheme has yet to emerge. The plan also fails to adequately address the KRAF's two most serious problems:

- *Corruption.* The program does not say how it will fund the higher salaries which we believe are needed to reduce corruption. [redacted]

- *A mediocre and bloated officer corps.* No provision has been made to ensure that incompetent officers are weeded out, good commanders are retained, or the level of competence at the senior level is raised through more intensive training. [redacted]

Civilian and military officials say they are hesitant to act in these areas because radical changes could destabilize the army and pose a political threat to the government, [redacted] In particular, deeper changes risk alienating the officer corps, whose loyalty was crucial to the government's ability to survive the 2 July coup attempt [redacted]

Two Potential Wild Cards To Watch

Our baseline judgment that neither side can make significant battlefield gains would change if either of two developments occurred:

- On the positive side, Thailand makes a sustained effort to seal the border to the Khmer Rouge [redacted]

Guerrilla strongholds in northwest Cambodia could become increasingly vulnerable to KRAF attack and the guerrillas' tactical mobility could be severely restricted.

- On the negative side, there is a successful coup in Phnom Penh, or a breakdown in the governing coalition that splits the military-- [redacted]
[redacted] rivalries within the government are still intense. Either occurrence could distract army commanders and weaken KRAF units, allowing the Khmer Rouge to break out of its relative isolation in the northwest and threaten Phnom Penh's control of more important parts of the country. Such a crisis could also undermine the credibility of the government and give the guerrillas a new opportunity to make political gains among the populace. [redacted]